



Winning the Big Game IS IT PRESSURE OR IS IT OPPORTUNITY?

By

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Hello Pine Richland Field Hockey,

I hope this newsletter finds everyone doing well. It was awesome to see everyone last month! I know you have some big games coming up and I am sending you a newsletter titled “Winning the Big Game – Is it Pressure or is it Opportunity”.

When you play big game such as a game against a big rival, a Conference game, a playoff game, or a championship game you may start to experience those butterflies. Anticipation is in the air and the excitement is building. Again, during these the times you might start to feel nervous or you might start to feel some pressure. For you or your team to play your game you must not let the word pressure or any similar word to enter your mind. Rather than experiencing a big game as a pressure situation see that big game as an OPPORTUNITY to prove that you are the best team. Once you allow the word like “pressure” to enter the equation, the process will revolve around avoiding pitfalls and barriers to your goal of winning a championship, and subsequently you will lose focus. In plain simple words instead of playing with freedom and confidence, with imagination and exuberance, you will spend your time trying to avoid mistakes and playing not to lose – a sure recipe for disaster. Do not think of any upcoming game as PRESSURE but as “OPPORTUNITY”.

Feeling nervous and experiencing butterflies before a big competition is not necessarily a bad thing. One of the biggest myths is that if you get nervous you will perform poorly. Experiencing jitters/butterflies and utilizing them in a positive way can help you propel yourself and your team to greatness. Teams who have won championships frequently talk about feeling the jitters prior to a competition and without these nerves they would not have been successful. People who experience the jitters frequently try to fight off the butterflies rather than accepting them and using them to enhance performance. The key thing is not to totally get rid of your butterflies but get them to fly in Formation.

Here are some tips that will help you relax and keep your cool:

- **REALIZE THAT IT’S OK** to be nervous and this is a natural part of the competitive process. Your butterflies is your body telling you it’s preparing you for what’s ahead and that you are ready to perform. The mentally tough athlete views nerves as a good sign and does not give in to it. If you get nervous or a little scared try to remember a successful experience where you were in complete

control and performing with confidence and at your best.

- **DISCIPLINE YOUR MIND FROM THINKING UNWANTED NEGATIVE THOUGHTS.** These unwanted thoughts can lead you towards the panic zone. Examples of such unwanted thoughts are: I'm a nervous wreck; I'm afraid I'll blow it; I don't want to get beat, or I know this is going to be a disaster. During these times you may experience physical symptoms such as nausea, discomfort in the stomach, rapid heartbeat, muscle tension, and even difficulty breathing. In addition your mind may begin to race, you might freeze and forget what you are supposed to do or say, you may feel out of control and make bad choices, or you may rush because the feelings of panic are unpleasant. **KEEP THE SELF TALK & BODY LANGUAGE POSITIVE, CONFIDENT, & CALM.**
- Remember **WIN – WHAT IMPORTANT NOW!** Do not over obsess about a mistake you made or shots that you missed. Learn from that mistake and move on quickly. If you keep yourself mentally in the past you will be stuck in mental quicksand and you will lose concentration, focus, and confidence. If a mistake is made stay calm and shift your mental attention to the upcoming play. Letting go of the past, forgiving yourself for the error, and refocusing on the present moment are crucial for getting beyond the mistakes.
- **FOCUS ON THE CONTROLLABLES.** Do not drag yourself down or waste energy trying to control things beyond your control such as the talent of the other team, bad officiating, the weather, field conditions, or the other team trash talking. Focusing on the uncontrollables will definitely bring you down. When in these situations remember to take a deep breath and focus on what you control. This will help you regain your rhythm and slow things down.
- **GIVE YOURSELF A STEADY DIET OF ENERGIZING IMAGES AND THOUGHTS.** Visualize yourself/team as a machine with power, a greyhound that moves quickly, or as an unstoppable force making the plays. If you feel tired imagine that you are carrying a spare fuel reserve with you, and think about pouring the extra fuel into your tank. Try different images to find the one that will give you the right feeling for the task you are facing.
- **SMILE & POSITIVE BODY LANGUAGE.** The signal that smiling sends your body and subconscious is that things are fine. When you frown or show negative body language you are sending yourself a message that there's a problem. Positive body language communicates confidence and it will also help relax your teammates. Remember, smiling is contagious.
- **CREATING MOTIVATING STATEMENTS/POWER WORDS/SLOGANS** Create a special motivating word(s) or phrase that will **FIRE** you up and have special meaning for the team. This affirmation like statements will help keep you together towards a common cause. During times of self-doubt your power word can bring you back to that state of peak performance.

- **CHANGING NEGATIVES INTO POSITIVES THROUGH AFFIRMATIONS**
Affirmations are positive self-statements that you focus on and repeat to yourself many times a day. An affirmation supports the way you want to view yourself and your abilities, or it supports a goal you want to achieve during a specific workout or competition. Affirmations are very powerful weapons you can use to combat negative self-talk. Affirmations will short circuit the negative self-talk. Examples of affirmations: “I choke under pressure” to “I always come through in the clutch”. “When things go badly, I fall apart” to “When the going gets rough, I hang tough”. “I can’t do anything right today,” to “I learn from my mistakes and they make me stronger”.
- **KEEP YOUR EYE ON YOUR GOAL BUT REMEMBER TO KEEP THINGS FUN & LOOSE.** Keep your eye on the prize but continue to remind yourself and your teammates that it’s fantastic that you have the **OPPORTUNITY** to be competing for a Championship or to win that big game. I know everyone wants to win but when you focus on the process, the things you control and the joy of the experience this will give you a better opportunity to have a great performance and will increase your probability of winning.
- **Remember it’s all about Pine Richland Field Hockey, Your Strengths, What you Control, and What you are trying to dictate on the field.**

Good luck, Keep up the great work, and do not stop believing in yourselves and in each other!

Best,
Dr. Fun!!!

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